No Crisis Atmosphere in Bonn

Report from Germany: The Bundesrepublik Is Prosperous, Smug and Unconcerned

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The Germans Never Cared Less

Bonn, March 20

In Frankfort, in the spring of 1946, I could still smell the unburied bodies in the massive ruins around the main railroad station. The scene, as one stepped into it then, was a night-marish backdrop for a Wellsian movie of war between the worlds. In the Park Hotel nearby, where American journalists were quartered, shellholes made it hazardous to go to the bathroom at night.

Now, 13 years later, one would hardly know there had been a war. The railroad square is lined with luxurious shops and high office buildings. The streets and trams are full of rosy-cheeked people, ponderously well-fed. The Park Hotel has acquired a full contingent of obsequious and resplendent flunkies.

Driving out of the city, on a lovely spring Saturday, the roads are filled with autos, scooters, motorcycles and bikes headed for the sports stadiums. Small black cars which remind one of tin lizzies, with "Polizei" painted in white on their hoods, are perched on the grassy edges of the roads, ready to swoop down on lawbreakers. Police guards in pairs stand at the stadium entrances with benevolent mien and military bearing. At one point a mounted police commander sits his steed with the grace of a cavalry officer.

Few Scars Are Left

Farther north in the Rhineland next day, in Dusseldorf where two-thirds of the city was destroyed, the rebuilt streets are full of promenaders enjoying a spring-time Sunday. The Koenigsallee, the Champs Elysees Napoleon created when he rebuilt Duesseldorf as a French bridgehead on the Rhine, is as lovely as ever. Travelling up and down the intensely battered Rhineland, it is only occasionally, near the railroad stations, a special target, that one can still see a bit of ruins. The war has left few scars on the German landscape, and even fewer perhaps on the German soul.

It is not difficult to like the Germans again—there are so many nice people among them—but it is hard not to end by being bored with them. They make dull fare. They have many virtues but there is no anguish in them. It is not an accident that they never produced a Dostoyevsky. Though their future may depend on learning from their past, the problem of How it Happened—of how a civilized people could be organized to the point of shovelling other peoples into gas furnaces—is a problem nice people don't talk about in Germany. In some extraordinary way the whole nation has acquired a warmly comforting amnesia, like a German feather bed. Often in talking with Germans, one has the feeling that the years between 1933 and 1945 were a blank through which, like Rip Van Winkle, they slept to awaken untouched and unchanged.

My first travelling companion turned out to be a Frankfort leather merchant, a good man. He had been a prisoner of war in England and liked the English. He was against re-armament of Germany. When I asked whether there were any Jews now in his native Frankfort, he said a part had come back, but people had little to do with them. The Jews themselves were "reserved" and kept apart. He said there was some feeling against the Jews; they were more clever than Germans in business. The few Jews who were bad hurt the reputation of the rest. There was also animosity because of restitution; Jews who sold a house in 1934 or 1937 or 1938 now came and got the houses back. This caused ill feeling. There was no mention of *why* they had to sell the houses, no reference to persecution. When he said only part of the Jews had come back, he explained that some of course had passed away. One would never have gathered from a word he said that there were any special reasons for their mortality. Nazism, of course, was never mentioned.

Why Germany Fears A 'Summit' Parley

"German politics . . . must see to it that the great powers do not by-pass the German problem, and come to an agreement among themselves on the basis of the status quo, i.e. on the basis of the division of Germany. . . . A relaxation [of tension] includes in itself the very danger that the great powers might simply by-pass the inconvenient German problem. . . . Only reluctantly and most hesitatingly did Bonn finally agree that at least a 'first phase' of disarmament might be tackled without simultaneous solution of the German problem. . . .

"This attitude reflects the fear of many Germans, and not the least those responsible for German politics, that a 'big deal' might be arrived at by the two world powers behind the back of Europe, and especially of Germany, by 'locking out' the German issue. . . . Thus, for some time, the Federal Government opposed the convocation of another 'summit' conference if such a conference were not also to include in its agenda the issue of German reunification."

—Meet Germany, Semi-Official Handbook.

Snug and Smug

Not all Germans are like that. I met some who are still haunted by those terrible years, though often they turned out to be men with Jewish or Polish wives whose own children suffered in the storm. I met a young student of law who, to the question "But what if Hitler had won?", answered with deep feeling, "I would rather have died than live on in such a world." But Germans of that kind, far from being typical, often tell you they do not feel at home in their own country. The mood of the Bundesrepublik is content, self-satisfied, wholly materialistic; snug and smug.

Lucifer is a tragic hero in *Paradise Lost,* but this is not a nation of Lucifers. It is capable of committing the most

(*Continued on Page Two*)

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Nothing Bad Really Happened But If It Did, They Were Doing Their Duty...

(*Continued from Page One*)

grandiose crimes in the most commonplace spirit. One begins to feel, in talking with them, that there are among the Germans large numbers of people capable of putting on various kinds of uniforms and committing the most awful crimes in an unimaginative, bureaucratic and paper-shuffling way and then going home and taking off their uniforms and becoming good fathers and good neighbors again and being not only surprised but offended if someone later has the bad taste to bring the matter up. The prevailing mood in Germany today when the question of Nazism comes up is that somehow they are being unjustly persecuted about matters which (1) never happened, but (2) were no different from what happens in every war and anyway (3) they were only doing their duty.

Odd Concept of Duty

Duty—*Pflicht*—is a word which represents an important component in the German's idealized image of himself. The word has a special flavor. Mme. de Stael, who admired the Germans, but wondered two centuries ago at the contrast between their boldness in philosophy and their submissiveness in politics, observed that they obeyed their superiors *"comme si tout ordre etait un devoir"*—as if every order was a duty. I heard many anecdotes about this conception of duty. A schoolmaster who was also the Nazi leader in a small town led his little Storm Troop to battle when a demonstration against the Jews was ordered. The daughter of one of the local Jews was his favorite pupil. She opened the door when the Nazis arrived. The schoolmaster leader patted her affectionately on the head and said comfortingly, "Don't be upset, we are only doing our duty." He then proceeded conscientiously to beat up her father. A Jewess, baptized at birth, who managed to live through the Third Reich because she had an influential Aryan husband told me this anecdote. She said it epitomized the Hitler years, that a kind of moral imbecility was more characteristic than sadism or hate.

This conception of duty is especially strong when it comes to serving as a soldier, an almost sacred profession in German eyes even now, as illustrated by the Niemoeller affair. Niemoeller comes closest in contemporary Germany to being a heroic spiritual figure, and a characteristically German one at that, since he first appeared on the national scene as a U-boat commander in the first World War, winning Germany's highest decoration. Then he became a pastor. Though a man of the nationalist right, he fought the Nazi attempt to take over the Protestant Church and he opposed persecution of the Jews. He was sent to a concentration camp, from which—again characteristically—he tried —to volunteer as a soldier and do his *duty* when war began.* Since the war, he has opposed the rearmament of Germany and seems to have become a pacifist.

Bonn's Dominating Delusion

"The stronger the West becomes and the closer its integration materializes, the sooner will the Russians recognize that their present policy toward Germany, aimed at its division, only imposes a burden upon them and brings them no advantage. On the other hand, if Moscow were ready to concede free elections in the Russian-occupied part of Germany, it would be possible to satisfy the security needs of the Soviet Union by international agreements as well as to come to terms regarding big economic concessions to be given Russia by Germany."

—Meet Germany, Semi-Official Handbook.

Criminal To Oppose Rearmament?

Several months ago Defense Minister Strauss declared that anyone who opposed the rearmament of Germany was a potential war-criminal. Pastor Niemoeller replied with a speech in which he said that the army, in training commanders and commandoes, was producing the next crop of war criminals. The Defense Ministry thereupon instituted a legal proceeding against the pastor for "insulting" the armed forces. This prosecution of Niemoeller aroused only mild protest; Nie-

***Just how mixed up Pastor Niemoeller was in his attitude toward the Hitler regime is indicated by a sermon he delivered in August, 1935, which was reprinted in the March, 1959, issue of Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung, as its own comment on the current controversy. In this sermon Pastor Niemoeller declared that war service was not against God's commandments but was "ein echtes weltliches Amt" a true worldly office necesary in this world and which could be performed properly despite the Fifth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." Hitler was then in process of creating the Wehrmacht. No country is as rich as Germany in these fine types of intellectual confusion.**

German Socialists Protest the Intelligence Ordeal Which Greets Refugees

"Interrogations by intelligence officers of the Western Allies are a part of the procedure which all Central [i.e. East Zone] German refugees have to undergo when they enter West Berlin in the first stage of their flight from Central Germany. These interrogations through Allied intelligence services are undignified and provocative. People who come to West Berlin do not want to furnish intelligence services with material. They want to leave the atmosphere of the Cold War at last. The first meeting with the 'Free World' for some of these poor refugees ends with bitter disappointment, for they are asked to do just that before which they fled—to act as informers or spies. This practice, which has been going on for some years, means new spiritual pains for those to whom it happens. . . .

"These interrogations by Allied secret services are also a scandal because they exploit the misery of the refugees. Real spies and agents, who are sent to the West by the German Communist authorities cannot be caught in this manner anyway because they will have their papers in order and choose different ways to reach West Germany. Officials in West Berlin have no way of telling refugees before they are questioned that their answers will not influence the decision whether they will be accepted as refugees. . . . Besides, the Allies insist on the right of interrogation on the basis of the occupation statute which is valid in Berlin.

"This undignified situation, which depresses refugees and puts us to shame, must be ended. The West German government insists on its sovereignty on all possible occasions. It should be sovereign enough to tell Paris, London and Washington that it is time to stop this procedure in Berlin. The allied governments, whom no one wants to deny the right to security and protection against spies, should use sources other than the moral misery of men, who have no other wish than to be left in peace and quiet."

—News from Germany, November 1958, a monthly published by the Social Democratic Party of Germany.

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. . . Rearmament Reviving the Old Habits of Obedience to An Officer Class

moeller had to back down and insist that he meant only *commandoes* and not commanders. Then a few days ago, President Heuss, who is supposed to be a great German liberal, made a speech at the Bundeswehr training academy in which, without naming Niemoeller, he warned the cadets of the academy against "demagogy clad as Christian."

"Why do you Americans give them arms?" a German woman doctor asked me indignantly. It is the rearmament of Germany which more than any other single factor is facilitating the rebirth of the old submissive Reich. Just after the war, among the youth, there was a real yearning for a new way; among the older people, *"ohne mich"*—"without us," i.e. count us out of the next war — reflected the dominant mood. The most dangerous thing about German rearmament is its effect internally, upon the German people. If there is to be an army, it must have officers. If there is again to be an officer class, it must be obeyed and respected. Soldiering must become an honored occupation again. Just how easily the youth can slip back into the old ways was illustrated for me by a young man in his middle twenties who called himself a pacifist and a follower of Niemoeller. Yet he had a deep respect for the German officer class. He saw no internal danger in its rebirth. The fact that these cultivated aristocrats had been disloyal to the Republic from the start and had connived in the coming to power of the Nazi rabble (as they considered them to be) had never occurred to him. This same young man told me that while his age group was still hostile to military service, the younger group between 17 and the early twenties had begun to feel it would not be *"anstaendig"* (becoming, decorous, proper) for Germans not to share in NATO's defense of Germany. This is the new propaganda line, and it has caught on. The era of *"ohne mich,"* as President Heuss proclaimed in that same address recently to the Bundeswehr officer academy, is over.

An Old Comedy Revived

It is as if an old comedy is being replayed here, but at a much swifter tempo. The comedy is the rebuilding of a "republican" German army by "good European" liberals. Stresemann in the twenties was the "good European" liberal as Heuss and Adenauer are now. Papers seized by our troops in Germany after the war have revealed the double game Stresemann played in the secret rearmament of Germany behind the backs of his Anglo-French colleagues. (See Hans W. Gatzke: *Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1954). It is useful to recall the Reichstag debates in the twenties when men like Chancellor Marx assured the Socialists that the officers and men recruited for the Reichswehr were being carefully screened to insure that the new army would be loyally republican. Adenauer and Heuss may not be Stresemanns but thanks to rearmament they have provided a facade behind which reactionary elements and real Nazis (not just opportunists) have infiltrated the armed forces and the government to the point where they could easily take it over if an economic depression or an international crisis required a change of policy. The Nazis are especially numerous in the Foreign Office.

At present, all goes well. The masses are content with the republic since they have jobs and bread. The leadership has only one real fear, an agreement between East and West over the heads of the Germans. The prospect that peaceful reunification is impossible does not alarm the leadership; on the contrary this is essential to their plans. Unlike the Americans, the German leadership has never felt that war was imminent and does not think so today; Bonn is far more relaxed than Washington. This estimate of the international situation plus the desire to extort political concessions explains why the leadership has moved so slowly in recreating a new German army. It did not want to rush into the crea-

(*Continued on Page Four*)

And Now Khrushchev Toasts Krupp

"As time went on, the undercover activities of the Reichswehr [after World War I] changed from passive obstruction of disarmament to more acute measures of rearmament. At this stage the aid of certain large industrialists notably Krupp and of Soviet Russia emerged as decisive factors. Russo-German military contacts can be traced with certainty back to early 1921, and the first agreement between the firm of Krupp and the Defense Ministry to circumvent the military restrictions of Versailles was concluded in January of 1922."

—Hans W. Gatzke: Stresemann and the Rearmament of Germany, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1954.

Germany's Military Plans, As Explained By Its Own Propaganda Pamphlet

". . . It was not until 1955 that a start could be made with German rearmament, after a break of ten years. The organizational requirements, which had already been made, were based on the political requirement of the Western powers, that a German army of 500,000 men should be established within three or four years. Meanwhile, it became clear, after one year, that this was not possible. These plans were dropped in the autumn of 1956. . . .

"An equally important consideration in Bonn [for dropping these plans] was the growing doubt about the military policies pursued up to this point. In the United States and Great Britain, a change-over from conventionally-armed forces to a smaller army, equipped with atomic weapons giving it a fantastic firepower, was being prepared. In Bonn the politicians drew their first conclusions from this new development. They saw a mass army based on general conscription as an anachronism and were in favor of a numerically smaller army. This army was to be given the most modern equipment possible and was to be composed primarily of . . . professional soldiers. . . .

"The outward expression of this 'New Look' . . . was the replacement of Defense Minister Blank. His successor was an advocate of the new military philosophy, the former Minister for Nuclear Energy, Franz-Josef Strauss. He had led the attack against the outmoded plans. . . .

"The outcome of his military policy is the more circumspect build-up of the Bundeswehr and the very careful choice of armaments, to avoid the danger of being overtaken by rapid technical developments.

"There exists no revolutionary plans for the further build-up of the Bundeswehr. The tremendous technical developments, especially in the sphere of rockets and the airforce necessitate continual reappraisal of the armaments and the organizational set-up of the forces."

—Meet Germany, An Introductory Pamphlet Given Foreign Journalists in Bonn by the Federal Press Office.

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(*Continued from page Three*)

tion of a mass army with obsolete weapons. It wants to wait (see box on page three) and develop a small army with maximum nuclear striking power. If it thought war at all likely, it would not have proceeded so slowly.

An urgent immediate objective is to block any agreement for denuclearization of Central Europe. By the time Adenauer was through with Macmillan, mutual withdrawal of forces had been changed not only to "thinning out" and possibly merely to a freezing of the military status quo, but qualified by the promise that an agreement *would not "discriminate against any particular kind of weapons or any nation."* The German army wants to be sure of having nuclear arms. If Adenauer were the "good European" he claims to be, if he were as distrustful of his own people as he says he is whenever reunification is discussed privately, he would hardly be so anxious to give them such dangerous weapons to play with.

Like a Modern High School in Tel Aviv

There is something precarious, unreal and "un-German" about the antiseptic white Bundeshaus from which Germany is now governed. It looks more like a modern gymnasium in Tel Aviv than a German Parliament. It bears no relationship to the dominant style of this lovely little Rhineland university town. In the corridors of the Bundeshaus, the deputies do not look at all like the natural rulers of the Reich. The military bearing, the *schmiss,* the arrogance, are completely lacking. The deputies look like out-of-work Shakespearian actors and slightly shady Balkan travelling salesmen as they rush by with their bulging brief-cases. Their clothes are ill-fitting, their overcoats shapeless, their lack of style painful. Their hair-dos tend to be those of German professors, a nimbus of unkempt hair around a balding brow. Many are returned exiles; there is about them all an air of not quite belonging. One feels that when comes *der Tag* again they will easily be swept away.

I was at the press conference at which the Socialist leaders, Carlo Schmid and Fritz Erler, reported on their unhappy mission to Moscow. The press conference was held in the modernistic assembly hall in the SPD (German Socialist Party) wing of the Bundeshaus. It was like a big classroom, adorned with one picture, that of the lean-faced Schumacher.

But The Others Won't Admit It

"He [Khrushchev] said: 'Who is really interested today in the reunification of Germany—Adenauer, the French, the Americans, the English?—No one.' At this point he lifted his forefinger and repeated: 'No one!' So Schmid and Erler were forced to conclude that Khrushchev himself wasn't interested in it either."

—Moscow dispatch, Sueddeutsche Zeitung, March 18.

Their melancholy report was music to the ears of Adenauer. Khrushchev's indifference to reunification was emphasized even more strongly in private (so a Socialist deputy told me) by Zorin who said flatly, "We *want* Germany divided." This was the end of the hope to which the Opposition had so long clung that maybe Moscow would agree to free elections, i.e. to relinquish East Germany, if Germany were denuclearized and out of NATO. The Adenauer crowd felt that Khrushchev had destroyed the opposition for them. When the Socialists shortly afterward issued their elaborate step-by-step plan for German reunification no one took it very seriously. A few years ago, it might have been possible. Now it seems to be too late.

The whole Adenauer policy of "containing" Russia until Moscow surrendered East Germany on Western terms is also in ruins, but it has been a long time since those on the inside believed in it. Its purpose was to anchor Germany securely to the U. S. and prevent a Moscow-Washington entente. What the Socialists fear is that the right will soon be saying that "democracy" failed to reunite Germany. The Socialists fear that when the army is fully grown, the right will look for a deal with Russia, and that an anti-democratic regime will ally itself for reasons of power and commercial expansion with Moscow.

But all this is still in the future. At the moment the placid German folk aren't very interested in anything. They are capable of wild moods of enthusiasm but rarely for republics, and their lack of fervor today extends even to national questions. I found no one who thought the West German people were very concerned about the "fate of their brothers" in the East or would be ready, if asked, to accept a lower standard of living for a while to liberate them. It may be different in Berlin, to which I go next, but here in the West the Germans never cared less.

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